

## CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

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July 2, 2003

Mr. Michael D. Remington  
Imperial Irrigation District  
333 East Barioni Boulevard  
P.O. Box 937  
Imperial, CA 92251

CALIF ENERGY COMMISSION

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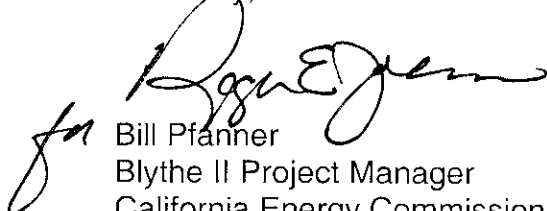
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Dear Mr. Remington:

On behalf of the California Energy Commission, I am submitting comments on the Desert Southwest Transmission Project Draft EIS/EIR. Enclosed are comments and suggestions on: Proposed Project and Need (Sections Executive Summary and Introduction); Biological Resources (Section 3.1); Cultural Resources (Section 3.2); Air Quality (Section 3.3); Geology and Soils (Section 3.5); Visual Resources (Section 3.6); Land Use (Section 3.7); Traffic and Transportation (Section 3.10); and Paleontological Resources (Section 3.12);

Should you have any questions, please contact me at (916) 654-4206.

Sincerely,

  
Bill Pfanner  
Blythe II Project Manager  
California Energy CommissionPROOF OF SERVICE (REVISED 6-12-03) FILED WITH  
ORIGINAL MAILED FROM SACRAMENTO ON 7-2-03

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Project Purpose and Need (Section ES-4)**

#### **1. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

In the Executive Summary (pages ES-4 to 6) and Introduction (pages 1-3 and 1-4), four project objectives are identified. As detailed in Objective 2, one of the basic objectives of the proposed project is to "Provide improved transmission access to new generation sources (e.g., the Griffith Energy Project, the South Point Energy Project, and the Blythe Energy Project) to meet the increased demands for electrical power in IID's service area....". Since the Hobsonway substation/switching station is not shown or described in the EIS/EIR connected to the transmission grid nor to any generating station, the EIS/EIR should explain how the objective would be realized. Also, since the Griffith Energy Project and South Point Energy Project are located in Arizona (even if Hobsonway substation/ switching station is connected to the grid), the EIS/EIR should describe how power from facilities in Arizona would be available to the IID system.

Objective 2 also states that the Devers to Hobsonway substation/switching station would respond to transmission service and interconnect requests. The EIS/EIR should identify any service and interconnection requests that have been received and describe the purpose.

Please note that the project description is inconsistent with the project objectives, and the project description and objectives should be updated to address the above comments.

#### **2. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Page 2-2 indicates that a Dillon Road substation/switching station would provide a connection to IID's existing Coachella Substation. The EIS/EIR should describe how this connection would be made and at what voltage.

We also note that the Blythe Area Regional Transmission Study shows a 500 kV connection from the Hobsonway 500 kV circuit to a new 500 kV Coachella bus, but the new 500 kV bus is not connected to IID's 230 kV system. The EIS/EIR should describe how the power from the Hobsonway 500 kV circuit would be routed to IID's loads.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Biology (Section 3.1)**

#### **3. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.1.1.5.4.5, page 3.1-28: The Fish and Game Commission was petitioned to list the western burrowing owl as an endangered or threatened species on April 8, 2003. The status of the western burrowing owl as an endangered or threatened species should be updated in the text of the EIS/EIR.

#### **4. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.1.3.2.3, page 3.1-67: While covering the impacts to federally-listed desert tortoise, the EIR/EIS has not adequately addressed the potential impacts to critical habitat for this species. The EIR/EIS should be more explicit on how much desert tortoise critical habitat will be temporarily and permanently disturbed by the installation of the transmission line(s) and tower(s), and whether this is a significant or insignificant portion of the particular critical habitat unit.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Cultural Resources (Section 3.2)**

#### **5. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.2.1.3.1.2 on pages 3.2-23-27 does not discuss the resources that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Table 3.2-2 lists all the identified resources, resource type, and the eligibility evaluation. The resource types include archeological sites, rock art sites, trails, sacred areas, and structures. The table should list the eligibility criteria under which the different resources could be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This is necessary to understand whether the project might impact a particular resource and the nature of the impact. Mitigation measures have to be based on the identified values (criteria) of the resource so it is necessary to identify all criteria under which each resource is considered eligible.

#### **6. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.2.2.1.2 on pages 3.2-36-39 discusses effects to prehistoric and historic archeological sites. This section is appropriate, but does not cover all resource types that have been identified, i.e. non archeological resources such as buildings, traditional cultural sites, rock art sites and trails. The EIS/EIR should include a discussion of the effects to other cultural resource types.

This section discusses the use of a treatment plan that would include a research design to identify actions required for mitigation. This assumes that all of the resources are eligible for information values (Criterion D). The EIR/EIS does not establish that this is the only criterion under which the resources would be eligible. The document needs a thorough discussion of the eligibility of the resources to understand the effects of the project on cultural resources.

#### **7. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.2.3.1 on pages 3.2-40-41 states that the Treatment Plan will indicate the sites to be avoided and detailed mitigation measures to ensure the avoidance. The project does not have to be constructed within the boundaries of a cultural resource to have an impact. This section assumes that physical avoidance of the resource would eliminate impacts to the resources. The EIR/EIS has not provided sufficient information to draw this conclusion. For some cultural resources, the setting may be a very important aspect of the resources integrity. The alteration of the setting may materially impair the eligibility of some resource types. The eligibility criteria need to be clearly stated for each resource including a discussion of the importance of the aspects of integrity for the eligibility of the resource. Without this discussion, the impacts of the project can not be concluded nor can the appropriate mitigation measures be identified in the treatment plan.

#### **8. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.2.3.3 on page 3.2-42 discusses data recovery to reduce adverse impacts. Previous sections of the EIR/EIS indicate that all the sites would be avoided except for unanticipated finds (Section 3.2.3.2, page 3.2-41-42). Again, this assumes that data recovery is the only mitigation that would be necessary and that all eligible resources that would be impacted only contain information values. This has not been established

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

in the analysis. Cultural resources identified during the inventory include types that would typically have more values than just information, that is, they would be eligible for criteria other than Criterion D.

A full discussion of the resources, the eligibility criteria, the resource values, important aspects of integrity, impacts, and appropriate mitigation needs to be provided in the EIR/EIS. If archeological sites are the only resources that are eligible to the NRHP and Criterion D is the only criterion under which the resources is eligible to the NRHP, then these mitigation measures are sufficient to mitigate the impact.

If buildings, structures, or archeological sites are eligible under other criteria (A, B, or C) of the NRHP, then the resource needs to be recorded to the Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record standards. In addition, public oriented documents need to be developed to provide a mechanism for the public to understand the resource and its importance. If an ethnographic resource is eligible for the NRHP, then mitigation measures need to be determined in consultation with the effected Native American group(s). If mitigation measures will not reduce the impacts to less than significant, then alternatives to the current proposal need to be considered.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Air Quality (Section 3.3)**

#### **9. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

DEIS/EIR p. 3.3-13. General Conformity rule requirements may be misrepresented. Section 3.3.3.4 suggests that if project emissions exceed the *de minimis* thresholds of the General Conformity rule, implementation of mitigation measures would be required. Our understanding of this federal rule is that, although mitigation would be appropriate, a formal conformity determination would also be required if approval of the project (a federal action by BLM) causes emissions over the thresholds. Because project impacts illustrated in Table 3.3-9, Section 3.3.5 would exceed the applicability thresholds of the General Conformity rule, Energy Commission staff recommends that the BLM coordinate with the U.S. EPA to determine whether a formal conformity determination is required.

#### **10. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

DEIS/EIR p. 3.3-18. Additional mitigation for reducing air quality impacts during construction is feasible and practical. Section 3.3.5 shows significant air quality impacts related to equipment exhaust and fugitive dust during construction and identifies a number of measures that would reduce the impacts to the extent practical. One measure requires submittal of a comprehensive inventory of equipment, but does not require the inventory to meet any specification or performance standard. Energy Commission staff recommends requiring the equipment in the inventory to meet modern emission standards. Other measures are feasible and should also be considered. Emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) can be further minimized with additional measures restricting construction equipment, fuels, and work schedule.

Energy Commission staff recommends that Air Quality Impact 1 Mitigation be revised to include the following measures:

- All large construction diesel engines, which have a rating of 50 hp or more, shall meet, at a minimum, the Tier 1 ARB/EPA standards for off-road equipment.
- All large construction diesel engines, which have a rating of 50 to 175 hp and do not meet Tier 2 standards for particulate matter, shall be equipped with catalyzed diesel particulate filters (soot filters), unless certified by engine manufacturers or the air district that the use of such devices is not practical for specific engine types.
- All diesel-fueled engines used for construction shall be fueled only with ultra-low sulfur diesel, which contains no more than 15 ppm sulfur.
- Greater vigilance in the application of dust control methods is required as wind speeds increase.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Geology (Sections 3.5)**

#### **11. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Geologic hazards may be present along the proposed alignment. In general, the most significant identified geologic hazard associated with the proposed transmission line is faulting and seismicity. The proposed line traverses the Holocene (active) San Andreas Fault twice and the pre-Pleistocene Chiriaco and Dillon Faults. A geotechnical report should be prepared that addresses mitigation measures required at Holocene (active) fault crossings. Liquefaction potential may be present in the Coachella Valley due to shallow ground water levels, sandy soils, and high seismicity. The geotechnical investigation should also address mitigation measures if liquefaction potential is present.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Visual Resources (Section 3.6)**

#### **12. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

In the absence of BLM established Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classifications, the EIS/EIR contains "interim" VRM Classes for BLM administered lands crossed by the proposed project. These interim VRM Classes (along with the BLM-developed VRM Classes for a small portion of the Coachella Valley) provided the basis for the visual impact assessment contained in the IID EIS/EIR. Unfortunately, these interim classifications have not been sanctioned by the BLM and therefore, are of limited value.

The EIS/EIR has concluded that only Class III and Class IV lands would be located along the I-10 corridor from the eastern end of the project area to the CVPA planning area. This may or may not be reasonable, although it should be noted that the BLM identified primarily Class II (more restrictive) lands along the portion of the I-10 corridor within the CVPA planning area.

Under the BLM system, impacts are determined by comparing the level of visual contrast created with the level allowed under a given VRM classification. Given the questionable nature of the EIS/EIR's interim VRM classifications, it is difficult to determine whether or not a given degree of project-induced visual contrast would be acceptable in a given location (since different VRM classes allow different levels of visual contrast). As the EIS/EIR notes on page 3.6-11: "strong contrasts are allowed in Class IV areas, but would need to be mitigated in Class II and III areas" ... and... "moderate contrasts would be allowed in Class III and IV areas but would need to be mitigated in Class II areas." Thus, the EIS/EIR's methodology would allow for moderate to strong visual contrast without mitigation, throughout the I-10 corridor. The exception is that portion of the I-10 corridor that the BLM has inventoried. Most of that area is Class II and would require mitigation. We recommend that the appropriate mitigation be developed to reduce these impacts and be included in the EIR/EIS.

#### **13. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

The eastern-most 42 miles of the proposed route have no Key Observation Points (KOP). This may or may not be defensible but there is not enough information to determine this from the EIS/EIR. The poor quality of the base imagery substantially limits the usability of the simulations. Given the poor quality of the imagery, it is difficult to impossible to determine either the accuracy of the simulations or the "story" they tell. What is clear is that the images are presented in a less than life-size scale and tend to understate project impacts. Therefore, we would recommend that new simulations be prepared at life-sized scale and with a more accurate visual presentation.



## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **14. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

KOP 1 is described (p. 3.6-16) as being "located near a residential area on Dillon Louise Street." The EIS/EIR should identify if this view is representative of the typical visual impact that would be experienced by residents in the nearby residential area.

### **15. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

KOP 2 appears to be oriented perpendicular to the direction of travel along Palm Road (a County-designated scenic corridor). This orientation would not capture the viewing perspective of greatest concern (the landscape within the primary cone of vision for travelers along Palm Road) but does allow for a landform backdrop behind the proposed structures (Figure 3.6-6), potentially reducing structure visual contrast. We recommend that KOP 2 be revised to be oriented within the primary cone of vision for travelers along Palm Road.

### **16. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

KOP 4 may not capture the reasonable worst case visual impact in this area. We recommend that KOP 4 be revised with higher quality images to determine whether or not there is sufficient visual contrast, view blockage, and structural prominence to warrant a determination of significant impact.

### **17. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

KOP 5 is also of concern because the imagery is not sufficient to support a finding one way or the other. Also, since the images for KOP 5 are not provided at a life-size scale, they inherently understate project prominence. We recommend that KOP 5 be provided at a life-size scale with a more accurately rendered image.

### **18. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

KOP 6 is described (p. 3.6-28) as experiencing moderate contrast, which would be in conformance with the interim Class III designation. The supporting images are of extremely poor quality, but the structures may actually result in a moderate-to-high to high degree of visual contrast. Further, the designation of the area as being Class III has not been confirmed by the BLM and is questionable. We recommend that KOP 6 be prepared at a life-size scale with a more accurately rendered image in order to assess the significance of this visual impact. If necessary, consider the potential mitigation for this location of moving the route further to the south toward the existing SCE 500 kV line.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Land Use (Section 3.7)**

#### **19. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.7.1, "Affected Environment", generally discusses land use and governmental land use classifications, but this section has insufficient information on current land uses. Maps and necessary text should be provided for the proposed project and alternatives that show the width of the corridors being studied and the numbers/sizes, locations, and types of residences, farmland, and commercial uses located along the route of the proposed project, including vacant parcels zoned for residential and commercial uses. These maps and accompanying text should include the distance of these uses from the proposed project. We are concerned that there may be a cumulative impact to farmland, residential, and commercial property in conjunction with other proposed projects in the area region. There should be an explanation of any significant cumulative impact and possible mitigation.

#### **20. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.7.1.3.1 discusses the proposed new substation/switching station on Hobsonway, but does not discuss the specific land uses of the proposed substation site. This section should include a description of the present use and zoning of the proposed Hobsonway substation site, (e.g. vacant; residential or nonresidential development; irrigated agriculture; timber land; or recreation).

#### **21. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 2.0, "Alternatives Including the Proposed Action, contains a general discussion of potential impacts, but does not address specific geographic points of potential impact and any necessary specific mitigation. This Section should contain a description of the location of specific geographic points of impact, the nature of the impact, and any necessary mitigation for the proposed project and alternatives.

#### **22. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.7.2.3, "Proposed Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures", refers to the conversion of Important Farmland and the crossing of two parcels of Williamson Act-designated farmlands by the Proposed Project. The Important Farmland and Williamson Act parcels should be identified by size and location. If there is a cumulative impact to farmland in conjunction with other proposed projects in the region, there should be an explanation of the significant cumulative impact(s) and discussion of possible mitigation.

#### **23. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

The community or county location is not listed for eight of the projects in Table 4-1, "Projects and Activities with Potential to Contribute to Cumulative Impacts". Some projects have street names listed (i.e. "The Kohl Ranch Specific Plan Area is located between Avenues 60 and 68 east of Harrison Street."), but there is no indicator of the overall community. The transmission substation projects also need to have general locations listed. A regional map showing each project in proximity to the proposed project, the alternatives, and to each other should be provided. If there is a cumulative impact to farmland, residential, and commercial property in conjunction with other

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

proposed projects in the region, there should be an explanation of the significant cumulative impact(s) and discussion of possible mitigation.

### **24. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.7.1.2.8, "Land Use Planning Documents", and Table 3.7-4, "Summary of Consistency with Land Use Plans", discusses relevant land use planning documents and project consistency with these documents. Table 3.7-4 discusses the need for an amendment to the BLM's California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA) if alternative B were to be adopted. This discussion should contain a detailed description of the CDCA amendment process. This discussion should contain information on the BLM's public meetings on the CDCA amendment process held in December 2000, and March and April 2001, including the level of public attendance at these meetings, and the written public comments received.

### **25. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

There is a potential overlap between the Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) proposed project and Southern California Edison's (SCE) Devers-Palo Verde 2 500-kV project. SCE recently notified the California Public Utilities Commission of its preliminary plans. Although SCE's project details are not available to the Energy Commission staff right now, the preferred route would likely parallel SCE's existing Devers-Palo Verde 500-kV line, which appears to be the same as IID's preferred project route up to the Blythe vicinity.

If there is a possibility of two new 500 kv lines (i.e., IID's and SCE's) being placed in the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) corridor, the Energy Commission staff will need to address that scenario with respect to line separation criteria from the reliability perspective, the potential impacts for areas affected by ground disturbance such as land use, biological, cultural, and visual resources, and soil and water resources, cumulative impacts, and possible mitigation.

### **26. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

The EIS/EIR should contain a summary of the nature of any discussions to date between SCE and IID regarding the potential overlap of these transmission line projects including:

- a. A Discussion of the minimum line separation criteria required for transmission system reliability purposes in terms of distance (e.g., If there are three 500-kV lines in an area, one must be separated from the other two by a distance of at least one mile to prevent a wildfire or other disturbance from causing a three-line outage).
- b. A discussion of the environmental impact and route implications of the response to Item 2, for each technical area that would be affected (e.g. land use).
- c. A discussion of whether the existing BLM utility corridor would need to be enlarged to accommodate three 500-kV lines (i.e., SCE's existing line, a new SCE line, and the proposed IID line),
- d. A discussion of whether such an enlargement, if needed, would trigger the BLM corridor amendment process and related schedule requirements.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Traffic and Transportation (Section 3.10)**

#### **27. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

Section 3.10.1 discusses the access roads along the existing transmission line corridors that would provide access to a majority of the Proposed Project and alternative transmission line routes. Except for major highways, a detailed description regarding these roads is not included. This section should include a map and description of the access roads for the Proposed Project and alternatives that include each road's location, and an analysis of any construction and operations period traffic impacts. For the access roads that are not gated or where public access is not limited in some manner, there may be a cumulative transportation impact in conjunction with other proposed projects in the region. The EIS/EIR, should discuss any significant cumulative impacts and possible mitigation measures.

## **IID TRANSMISSION LINE EIR/EIS COMMENTS**

### **Paleontological Resources (Section 3.12)**

#### **28. BACKGROUND AND COMMENT**

The proposed transmission line crosses geologic units that are known to contain fossil resources and have been assigned a high sensitivity rating with respect to paleontological resources. A paleontological field survey and literature review should be performed as part of the EIS/EIR and filed with IID and BLM as a confidential supplement. If the proposed project crosses private or state administered lands, the project should address state laws, ordinances and regulations, including California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). If the project crosses BLM administered land then federal laws ordinances and regulations for protection and salvage of paleontological resources, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), need to be identified for compliance.